

Working for Change – active global citizenship

Narration

In the 1960s, Canadian author Marshall McLuhan caught the world's attention with an idea. He saw the world becoming increasingly connected through electronic technology and media. He talked of a global village. Forty years later, we may ask: What is the state of this global village?

Students

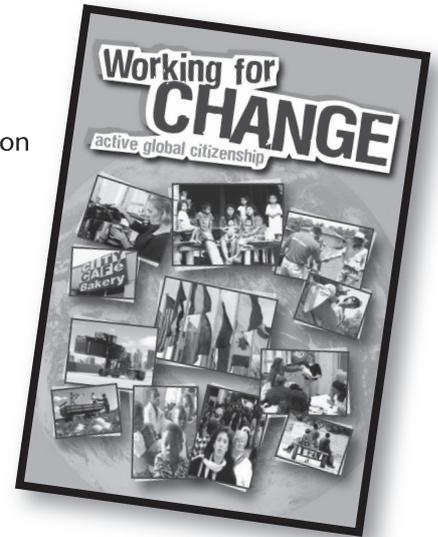
Do you think that we live in a world that is interconnected?

Definitely with technology - it is bringing the global community together...

With the internet you have access to world-wide knowledge...

We're definitely connected through foods and cultures, like, I've been exposed to so many different cultures just being here in Canada.

Transportation is getting faster and we can go more places like my step-brother was saying, he lives in Hawaii and he was saying that he could get anywhere within 24 hours...



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McLuhan's vision of a global village raises questions for us today. In an interconnected world, what responsibilities do we have to others? To our planet? Are we citizens of one country? Or citizens of the whole world? In a global village, what does it mean to live as global citizens?

Kim Fry, Ontario Environment Network

Air pollution, water don't really abide by borders. Animals that migrate don't really abide by borders and clearly, in Canada, when you look around a grocery store anywhere; you see that products are coming from all over the world. It's clear that we have a connection between different countries and different peoples. Global citizenship, for me, is an increasingly new concept that takes into account global rights that we have, global responsibilities that we all have, and global justice.

John Stackhouse, Foreign Editor - Globe & Mail

Being a global citizen is thinking in terms of the planet as what I do, the choices I make, how does that affect the planet, all six or seven billion people. More importantly, tomorrow's planet, the eight or ten billion people that will be living on the planet 20 to 40 years from now.

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It's ironic that even as we become more interdependent, the gap between people in our global village gets wider every year. For some, globalisation means more wealth, cheaper consumer goods and greater opportunities. But others are faced with deepening poverty and few choices. Many can't meet their most basic needs - for health care, schooling, clean water, or even food to survive. Despite modern technology, the rich and the poor can live their separate lives with little understanding of how others live or how we are all connected.



In theory, a more connected global world benefits everyone, as trade, investment and knowledge flow freely between countries and people. But, sadly, this is not the case.

- ▶ Consider the price of a cup of coffee - only 2 cents reaches those who grow and harvest the coffee beans.
- ▶ Poor countries spend more on debt payments to wealthy international creditors than they do on health care for their own people.
- ▶ Almost three billion people - half the world's population - live on less than two dollars a day; 54 countries are poorer today than they were 15 years ago.
- ▶ Environmentally, we live beyond the planet's capacity. Today, just 20% of the world's population is responsible for 86% of all private consumption.

Is this the world we want? Is it the world we want to leave for future generations?

Are the values of globalisation our values? An interesting case study is the Urrá hydroelectric project in Colombia, South America, funded in part with Canadian money.

The Embera Katío are indigenous people who live in northern Colombia. They believe the Earth is their source of life and consider it their responsibility to protect the environment for future generations. They rely on fish for protein, and plant rice and other crops along riverbanks.

In the late 1990s, life for the Embera Katío changed dramatically when a hydroelectric dam was built on the Upper Sin river.

The dam blocked the course of the river and flooded vast areas of land. Many species of fish in the region were nearly wiped out. The Embera Katío watched helplessly as their main source of protein vanished. Undernourished, the people became weak and vulnerable to new diseases. Children began to die.

Indigenous woman

I felt like crying when I saw our river, which is no longer running. I said to myself - our father is dead - now we are going to die of hunger and sadness.

Narration

The Urrá dam was a joint project of the Colombian government and international investors, including Export Development Canada, a Canadian financial institution. More than 25 million dollars of Canadian money was spent on the dam.

The dam brought hydroelectric power to the region, benefiting investors. But it was built without consulting the indigenous communities, and it devastated the environment, culture and way of life of the local people. An independent consultant found more than 100 negative impacts from the project.

This raises questions about the citizenship responsibilities of corporations. Are transnational companies responsible for protecting human rights and ensuring sound environmental practices wherever they operate? The Embera Katío have their own opinion.

Indigenous woman

Indigenous people need to be respected. Because how can it be that foreign companies invest here and then afterwards we have worse problems than before. Maybe it doesn't affect you but it is very serious for us - it's our people who are dying.



Manuel Rozental, Canada / Colombia Solidarity Campaign

You have some companies that go wherever they go and people seem to be better off. Indigenous peoples are respected, labour is treated well, benefits are granted and so on and there are those. But then are the other ones who actually wherever they go they are abusive in exploiting and oppressing people. Corporate responsibility cannot be given to the corporations. It has to be done by citizens and governments and they have to be watchdogs.

Narration

If globalisation too often results in a widening gap between the rich and the poor, and widespread environmental damage, it's not for a lack of alternatives.

Around the world, people are working together to bring hope to families, empower change in communities and sustain the environment. Through hard work, they are improving health and nutrition, establishing good schools, increasing family incomes and protecting natural resources.

At the same time, there is growing recognition that to really make a difference we must address the global systems which keep people poor.

The state of Ceará, in northeastern Brazil, is one of the poorest areas in South America. Half the population lives in extreme poverty, earning less than \$40 per month. Yet it's here that a new kind of global relationship was initiated - one that respects people and the planet, and is good business.

Aided by an international development bank loan, World Vision helped local farm families begin a fair trade co-operative. The farmers grow organic melons for large supermarket chains in Europe. Families that once struggled just to survive now earn a decent price for their crops. They can borrow money to invest in their farms; parents are able to put their children through school and plan for their future. A fairer trading system has given the community a new lease on life.

Jao Helder Diniz, Project Manager - World Vision Brazil

'When we came here - we realised that the farmers of this area were producing a very high quality and marketable product. World Vision was able to connect them with markets in Europe so they were able to sell their product outside of Brazil as well as locally.'

Narrator

Thanks to this initiative, farm income has tripled, and families like the Marcunhos are beginning to break the grip of poverty on their lives.

Marcunho family (Brazilian family)

Father: I was worrying so much about my debts that I could not sleep well at night. But now I am on my feet again - and I can sleep well again.

Mother: We have now been able to buy clothes for the children, shoes, also a crib for the baby and clothes for the baby. Now we can buy the things we need. I am very happy.

Narration

This example from Brazil shows what's possible when we get globalisation right. Everyone can benefit. Governments, businesses, organizations and individuals all have a role to play.

John Stackhouse, Foreign Editor - Globe & Mail

The world is changing at a rate that most of us can't keep up with, that most of us can't comprehend. So what do we do? Well we can better understand our consumer purchases, from the clothes that we wear to the food that we eat. Where is it coming from? How is it produced? What influence does that have on developing countries? ...The coffee that you drink is not just what keeps you awake when you're feeling a bit drowsy, it's about how the world is going to be ten years from now...

Interview: John Bergen, City Café Bakery

Why did you decide to start selling fair trade coffee?

Why did we decide to sell fair trade coffee? Well basically you're buying from co-ops, environmentally it's much better made. Coffee used to grow underneath the canopy in rainforests. And coffees have been rehybridized or whatever so you can tear down the rainforests and grow a whack of them. And what you end up with is very large corporations doing this. The average guy who works on the plantation makes very little money. Environmentally - the whole process is a messy one. Where with fair trade you are buying from individual farmers who are guaranteed a livelihood and who deal with co-ops. Once again it's a much more sensible way of doing things. I mean, I drive an Astro van - my life is a messy one. In fact in North America we all live messy lives. And we're not going to change the world by what coffee we buy - but we can change a bit of the world. There is more goodwill out there - people make decisions, make sacrifices, they do small things. And so that's why I like the community idea. I mean, me helping my neighbour is a profound thing. I think that's kind of like fair trade - we are reaching out - there is another community out there that we are doing something about.

Narration

Living a simpler life, helping our neighbours, supporting development that puts people before profits - these are all acts of global citizenship.

Some are taking the next step by actively working for change in the global village. They question the underlying causes of poverty and injustice - and promote solutions. They use tools of globalisation - the Internet, the media, broad-based political mobilisation - to work for justice.

In a complex, interdependent world, change doesn't come easily. But when people join together, they can have a significant impact:

- ▶ Pressure from an international people's movement led to a ban on land mines.
- ▶ Popular protest was instrumental in getting debt reductions for the poorest countries.
- ▶ Clothing manufacturers are beginning to listen to consumers who don't want their shirts and shoes made in sweatshops.
- ▶ And ordinary citizens are putting justice issues - such as fairer trade, responding to HIV/AIDS, peace-building and ending human rights abuses - on the agendas of world leaders.

Global citizenship begins with asking questions about the world as it is, about the world we want and about our role in shaping the global village. Real transformation happens when we exercise our rights and responsibilities as global citizens and work for change.

Manuel Rozental, Canada / Colombia Solidarity Campaign

In fact, nobody will change this planet; nobody will change this world except for young people discovering that they can do it. Being young is going for it, changing stuff, believing in things, knowing that you can do something different. Being young is changing things.



Kim Fry, Ontario Environment Network

As a young person, you need to recognize all the different levels that you can get involved, that you can speak out about issues that are happening globally, internationally or in your own country ... If you have thousands and thousands of people doing small little things together that all adds up to a pretty big thing.

Students

Another example is in this class, this World Issues class, we all for about a week, we each brought in any spare change we had...and gave it away... And it was a really positive thing because we were, for that week, we were not thinking about ourselves, we were thinking about how can we help other people? And that's important to take an active role in our society.

We cannot stress the importance of thinking for ourselves, because there are corporations out there that will try to think for us. There are governments out there that are going to assume that this is what everyone thinks.

It's a matter of awareness and as long as you are aware of what's going on in the world around you - you do watch the news, you do keep up on what's going on, you do have teachers like our World Issues teacher to teach you about worldly things - then you become more aware and that's what makes you a global citizen.

John Stackhouse, Foreign Editor - Globe & Mail

I think Canada would be a better place if every nineteen-year-old in the country spent six months working in a developing country in a school, in a field, in an office, not because they'd be giving something to that country, but because they would be bring something home with them that would stay with them for the rest of their lives.

Kim Fry, Ontario Environment Network

Knowledge is an incredibly powerful thing and I think that people underestimate the importance of knowledge and knowing issues and knowing them really well...trying to find out as much information as you can and always asking yourself, who is telling me this and why are they telling me this...

Manuel Rozental, Canada / Colombia Solidarity Network

Most people in the poorest countries in the worst conditions are not kneeling down, they're standing up, they're trying to change things. They're actually dying for it; they're being jailed for it. They're being starved for it. But here you're free to think, you're free to decide, to find out what's going on. ...If you use your freedom to help others achieve what they have a right to achieve, you will become a real global citizen and that's what we need to do...